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VOL. 13 NO. 18
SEPTEMBER 1983
ISSUE NO. 276

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LETTERS

I cannot let the extremely self-serving letter by the anonymous Amtrak ticket agent go unanswered (RTN 274). It is understandable that the man wants to save his job--indeed I have no desire to see it eliminated. But to blame his plight on travel agents or say that most travel agents should not issue Amtrak tickets is simply untrue.

Consider the following: First, most travel agents do not sell Amtrak tickets. Only thosewho want to and for the privilege they pay $40 a year in Amtrak dues. Consequently I believe most do know what they are doing.

Secondly, a travel agent is paid nothing until he or she sells an Amtrak ticket. The ticket agent is paid every day, including holidays, sick leave, vacations plus the cost of the phones, computers, ticket machines, lights, etc. Surely this costs Amtrak a good deal more than the mere 10% of the ticket they pay a travel agent.

It is true that Amtrak refers buyers to travel agents. Why not?—we actively promote the sale of tickets. My agency spends about $150 a month just advertising Amtrak. My sales rep has never referred a group to me, but if she did I would certainly take it and I think I have a lot more experience handling groups all over the world than most Amtrak ticket agents.

Airlines have closed ticket offices all over the U.S. because they have found it cheaper to use travel agents. The same is probably true of Amtrak. The agent who wrote the

(continued on page 23)

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Published twice monthly by Message Media, P. O. Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709. Subscription $19.00 per year; single copy 80¢. Overseas and institutional rates on request. STAFF: James Russell, Editor. Paul Rayton, Editor-at-Large. Regional Correspondents: Peter Putnam Bretz, Southern California; Jack Ferry, Illinois; Adron Hall, Mississippi; Kenneth Maylath, Maryland; Peter Roehm, Massachusetts; Ted Scull, New York.

ON THE COVER

A train of new cars on Chicago's South Shore Line. This is train no. 8 from South Bend and Michigan City, photographed recently near the Hammond, Indiana station by Jack Ferry. The last revenue operation of the South Shore's old cars took place on Sep 25, after "57 years of faithful service." A photo of a train of the old cars appeared on the cover of RTN 270. See the Urban-Suburban Transit section of this issue for more details on the last run ceremonies.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

We've already received a tremendous response from our last issue, in which we began phasing in the use of our new typesetting equipment. Undoubtedly you noticed the new, clearer, more varied typefaces in RTN. This change is one of the improvements we promised you at the beginning of this year. Our improved on-time performance is the most important one, and readers have commented on that, too.

We would like to have your comments about our new typefaces. Please let us hear from you. (We also introduced within the past few months a new platemaking system for our printing press, which results in higher printing quality, including better reproduction of photographs.)

All these changes are being made for the purpose of bringing you the best quality rail passenger publication that we can.

SP & Santa Fe Plan Merger

The Southern Pacific Co. and Santa Fe Industries, parent companies of the two Western railroads, announced on Sep 27 that they plan to merge. A merger would create a railroad of over 25,500 miles with about $4.3 billion in annual revenues. The ICC must approve any such merger. In May 1980 the two railroads talked of a similar plan which never came to fruition, and which was frowned upon by the ICC. It is believed that today such a merger would meet with ICC approval.There is further speculation that the combined Santa Fe Southern Pacific Corp., as it is to be called, would seek to acquire Conrail, thus creating a genuine coast-to-coast railroad. The two companies are seeking to complete the transaction before year-end, altho ICC approval probably would not come that soon. Rail passenger observers feel that a merger would mean improved relations with Amtrak on what are now SP routes. The Santa Fe has always been characterized as cooperative with Amtrak, while SP has frequently been uncooperative in areas where it put freight interests first.

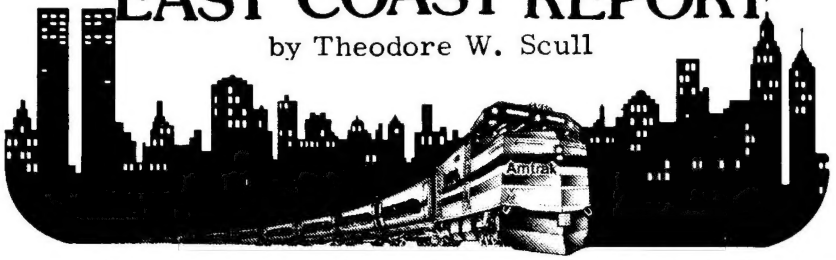
In other SP news, it was announced Sep 30 that the company will sell Tico, its insurance subsidiary, to American Can Co. Tico is the largest title insurance company in the U.S. The selling price is $271.3 million.

COAL-SLURRY BILL IS DEFEATED

The House of Representatives on Sep 27 defeated by a large 53-vote margin the controversial coal slurry bill. The defeat is a victory for railroads, environmentalists and farmers. The bill would have permitted construction of underground pipes to carry coal from its production points, adversely affecting railroads. Most of the nation's coal is presently carried by railroads.

EAST COAST REPORT

by Theodore W. Scull



The Metropolitan Transportation Authority's monthly Board Meeting on Sep 16, scheduled for 8:35am, got off to a delayed start at 9:35 without apology or explanation. Before any of the reports could be read, a group called ACORN invaded the public meeting. Members began vocally protesting poor subway service in their neighborhoods of Brownsville, Crown Heights and East New York with a few rounds of "We are fired up. We won't take it no more." Daniel Scannell, acting president of the Transit Authority, looked up briefly from his notes and simply said, "Get rid of them."

The plainclothes and uniformed security forces ejected the group, which numbered about forty, from the room and then allowed them to speak to the media in the foyer. ACORN criticized the reduction of subway service, poor equipment and unsafe conditions on the Brooklyn end of the No. 3 IRT New Lots Avenue line. The Transit Authority announced that effective Sep 26 six extra 10-car trains will be added to the line during the morning rush hour and eight extra trains in the evening, making the totals 34 and 36 respectively. The TA also promised more air-conditioned cars.

While the public and the press are invited to witness the MTA proceedings, these are not public hearings or an open forum and, therefore, the public may act only as silent spectators.

Probably the most important news that came out of the otherwise routine series of reports concerned the "red tag" program, the identification and repair of several hundred spots where subway speeds must be reduced because of track deterioration. Scannell said that the program which began in Jun 1983 had been expected to take 1½ years before normal speeds would return to the system, but the work was proceeding so rapidly that Jan 15, 1984 was now set as the completion date. Part of the good news, he said, could be attributed to a large number of unnecessary "red tags."

The issue was further complicated a couple of days later when the press reported that the MTA would award track management supervisors a 1% pay bonus if the January date was met. The union leadership immediately responded by asking the same bonus for their men who were actually performing the work. The issue is unresolved at the time of this writing.

★★★

Recent trips on the Lexington Avenue locals and expresses between 68th Street and stations in Manhattan and Brooklyn have resulted in some agonizingly slow journeys. Total shutdown of service was once an almost unheard of occurrence on New York City's 24-hour subway system, but the nature of the work now necessitates this kind of disruption. For three weekends beginning Oct 7, from late Friday night to early Monday morning, there will be no thru service on the No. 4 and 5 trains on the Lexington Avenue line between the Bowling Green and Fulton Street stations in lower Manhattan. Passengers will be forced up to the street to ride shuttle buses between these two points. As the stations are quite close together, walking may be the faster way.

The B, D, N, QB and RR lines will also have some complex service changes and in some cases suspension of service or abbreviated runs. The Transit Authority is making considerable effort to advise the public with notices in stations, platform and train announcements, handouts and car card advertisements, spots on the radio and press releases to the media. So the public be warned!

★★★

The Long Island Rail Road appears to have the only serious campaign to increase off-peak ridership in the whole MTA system. LIRR President Robin Wilson reported that off-peak revenue was up for the system as a while, and in particular, he reported that the combination rail/bus ticket sales for the day excursion to Jones Beach, including locker fee, increased from 73,000 in 1982 to a projected 118,000 in 1983.

The LIRR has for many years run a successful program of tours using regular rail services and charter buses to visit a whole host of scenic and historic sites on the island. One of the most attractive, and one that this correspondent hopes to sample this fall, is one costing $30, that includes a parlor car seat from Jamaica to Montauk and back (3 hours each way), with connecting train from Penn Station and Flatbush Avenue, a continental breakfast on the outward trip, bus transfer to and from Gurney's Inn, full-course lunch and four hours of free time to tour the eastern end of Long Island. A folder of Fall Tours can be obtained by writing Customer Sales-Tours, Long Island Rail Road, Jamaica NY 11435.

★★★

NJ Transit is getting into the act too, tho in a smaller way, on its Saturday Pony Express trains toand from Monmouth Park Race Track. On Jul 23 the cost of the roundtrip dropped by a third from $11.75 to $8.50, and courtesy of the Park a $1 coupon for reduced admission was added. The spectacular results are readily evident. Before Jul 23 an average of 396 rode the NJT trains to the Park, and since then, thru Sep 3, the ridership increased 240% to an average of 950. The promotion was done with 5000 notices distributed at station ticket windows with an additional 60,000 handed to patrons as they left Monmouth Park. Are there lessons here for Amtak on selected lines?

Ridership on the NJ Transit rail lines as a whole is difficult to analyze because of the 35-day strike in March and April and the temporary disruptions to service on the Morristown Line with the continuing re-electrification work. Ridership is, by all accounts down, tho better than predicted according to Executive Director Jerome Premo.

★★★

Thanks to Long Island RTN reader Peter Lichtenfeld, M.D. for a Sep 3 *Toronto Star* travel page article about a privately-operated overnight luxury train that might begin running this time next year between Toronto and New York. The organizers are Sam Blyth, who ran the Show Trains across Canada and is the wholesaler for the **Orient Express** , and Tucker Lamkin of Railplex (U.S.), operator of transcontinental nostalgia rail trips.

The train, using equipment from the 1940s and 1950s, would be all-sleeper with a $150 one-way fare that included dinner and breakfast. The route would use VIA Rail routes in Canada and an unspecified private railroad in New York State (that might be difficult). The current competition is VIA/Amtrak's daylight **Maple Leaf**, an all-coach train that makes the trip in just under 12 hours.

A well-run and not overdone luxury operation might just have a chance, as there is

considerable business and tourist travel between these two very exciting cities, and the schedule could be a classic 6pm to 9am (or shorter) one, not involving any part of the normal working day. More details and enthusiasm will be forthcoming in this column if the project enters the more-than-speculative stages.

RAIL CANADA

NEW TRANSPORT MINISTER Lloyd Axworthy is seeking to smooth over the political turmoil surrounding the 1981 cutbacks of VIA Rail, undoubtedly in light of upcoming elections. He was appointed the new federal minister Aug 12 (see RTN 274), and already has asked VIA to consider restoring two of the routes that had been cut. The two are the Edmonston N.B.-Moncton Dayliner, which will be restored tri-weekly, and the Winnipeg-Melville-Edmonton route, which reportedly will resume daily operation in a few weeks. The Minister asked for a complete review of the 1981 cuts to see if changes such as consumer demand or "other conditions" would now make the runs viable. He said he wanted to "re-establish the credibility" of VIA Rail as a national service that serves all regions, and not just Central Canada. Transport 2000 Canada applauded the new outlook at the Transport Ministry. T-2000 President Guy Chartrand called the restorations a "great victory"and said he hopes to go on to get a connection from Jasper to Kamloops, and daily service (now tri-weekly) Montreal-Senneterre, and Montreal-Lachute-Hull-Ottawa, as well as restoration of the ATLANTIC LIMITED.

THE ATLANTIC LIMITED could be restored under a plan proposed by the Coalition for Improved Rail Service, in Saint John. CIRS, along with Transport 2000, has presented to officials a plan to restore the ATLANTIC LIMITED while removing the OCEAN. Supporters note that the changes they suggest would save VIA at least $2 million yearly and at the time yield better service for passengers. They hope that VIA will make its own cost study of the proposal.

VICTORIA-COURTENAY DAYLINER is up for discontinuance. CP has applied to drop the Vancouver Island run, and the Canadian Transport Commission will hold public hearings on the matter at Courteney (Oct 4), Nanaimo (Oct 6) and Victoria ((Oct 11).

HEARST-NAKINA TRAIN is up for discontinuance. The CN has applied to the CTC to drop the service, and hearings will be held Oct 3 in Hearst (Ont.) and Oct 5 in Nakina (Ont.). CN claims a loss of $367,416 on the service in 1982.

MONTREAL-RIGAUD COMMUTER line will be modernized, with $50 million spent over the next three years, it was announced Sep 9 by Quebec Transport Minister Michel Clair and Robert Bockstael M.P., representing federal Transport Minister Lloyd Axworthy. Among improvements, two parking lots will be built at the Beaconsfield and Lake side stations; the 17 train stations between Montreal and Rigaud will have their platforms rebuilt, and the tracks and signals will be improved. It is hoped that ridership will be increased to 7000 daily.

THE EDMONTON LRT should be called something else because many people, including tourists, don't know that it's a transit system, claims Edmonton legislator Gerry Wright. He suggests calling it Metro, or even just Subway.

VISITORS TO CANADA must all carry identification cards, in a 2-month experiment begun Sep 1. The experiment will become permanent if deemed successful. The plan is to attempt to cut down on illegal immigration. Cards will be issued at customs checking points.

DOUBLE-DECKER CARS are being considered by VIA as equipment replacement for transcontinental service. VIA VP Harold Murray said that double-decker cars are "likely candidates" for the next VIA equipment order. Nine complete trainsets would be needed for transcon service. Transport 2000 recently did a study that evidently convinced VIA that the cars (similar to Amtrak's Superliner cars) would be economical.

THE CANADIAN PACIFIC has been trying to stop public hearings into the crash last March of the Edmonton-Calgary Dayliner.

EDMONTON-WINNIPEG SERVICE restoration will probably take the form of a thru train with coaches, sleepers and dining service, according to a statement from VIA Public Relations Manager Mike Williams in Winnipeg. The train would substitute for the Winnipeg-Regina and Regina-Saskatoon Dayliners. Williams also said that restoration of Edmonton-Vancouver service might be done temporarily for the 1986 World's Fair in Vancouver.

QUEBEC TRANSPORT MINISTER Michel Clair, according to a Radio Canada report, would be replaced in Quebec City by Alain Marcoux.

CANADIAN RAIL TRAVEL NOTES by Tom Higgins

The RDC run to and from Fredericton, N.B. starts out as one car from Fredericton, with one or two cars added at St. John, and a single car added at Truro (the second train of the day down from Sydney). It's VIA's train of everywhere. The process is repeated in reverse, and by the time you get to Fredericton there is but a single car. The ridership is good, especially to Moncton, where it connects with the OCEAN both ways. The high speeds—and ridership—are from St. John to Moncton.

LE CHALEUR, trains 16 & 17, have been a resounding success. What began as a baggage/dorm/roomette car (only 10 roomettes sold to the public), a snack bar coach in the 3200 series, and another coach, has grown into the baggage/dorm sleeper/roomette car (with 10 roomettes sold), a "Green" series sleeper, a Dayniter, a 750-series bar/lounge/diner/takeout counter, and from 2-4 coaches. At times it has two engines and 10 cars. An extra 5500-series coach and baggage car (9600-series) are stored in Gaspe for the extra ridership. If you plan to take this trip, check with VIA—it might go back to the original 3-car consist in September. It would make a beautiful trip in the fall, with most of the scenery visible eastbound, and what you missed you would see westbound. The crew was about the friendliest I've ever met.

URBAN-SUBURBAN TRANSIT

DETROIT-PONTIAC COMMUTER trains will be discontinued by SEMTA on Oct 14. NARP reported that there was little hope for saving them.

HOLLYWOOD BOWL SUBWAY stop on the planned Los Angeles Metro Rail system was disapproved by the L.A. City Council Sep 30 by a unanimous 12-0 vote. The final decision on whether to build the station, which would serve concert-goers to the famed Bowl, must be made by the Rapid Transit District. But pressure is being applied to eliminate the station. Congressmen are warning that they are concerned about the plan, which would cost $75 million for the one station alone.

LONG BEACH-L.A. light rail line plan will have two public hearings in October: at Compton on Oct 20 and at Long Beach Oct 25. Meetings are at 7pm. The present plan estimates 27,800 daily riders, with two-car trains running at 12-15min intervals during normal hours of service.

OXNARD COMMUTER TRAIN got a green light of sorts on Sep 27 when a U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reaffirmed the District Court, deciding that the state Public Utilities Commission has final authority over rail passenger issues. This leaves the PUC free to decide what fair compensation Caltrans should pay the SP to run the Oxnard commuter trains. Whether Caltrans will actually move now to get them running again is another question in the present anti-rail climate of the state government.

SOUTH SHORE LINE between Chicago and South Bend ran its 57-year old interurban cars in revenue service for the last time on Sep 25. For the occasion, the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District published a brochure telling the history of the cars and explaining plans for their future.

The National Park Service has requested 10 of the cars for the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. The Park Service will restore several of them for historical displays, and is examining the possibility of using some of them in shuttle service from a proposed East Unit Transit Terminal on the west side of Michigan City to the Mt. Baldy Beach. The South Shore has also donated 10 cars toNICTD and two cars to the Illinois Regional Transportation Authority. Other cars have been purchased by different museums around the country. Numerous requests for the cars came from all parts of the U.S.

The orange and maroon cars have been a familiar part of Northwest Indiana's landscape for 57 years. The cars were built by the Pullman Co. of Chicago and the Standard Steel Car Co. of Hammond between 1926 and 1929, being built to expectionally high standards. The cars were 60 feet long and weighed 60 tons. Ten cars were combination baggage-passenger cars, while the rest were full coaches with separate smoking compartments and two toilets. Twenty cars featured rotating bucket seats. Four parlor-observation cars and two diners were ordered as well as 13 trailer cars. During World War II the cars were lengthened to 80 feet, seating 80 passengers rather than 56. The South Shore continued to operate some of the original "shore cars", in addition to the 36 lengthened cars until the new fleet of stainless steel cars began arriving last year. Eight to ten of the lengthened cars were kept in regular revenue service until Aug 25, when they were replaced by the final order of eight new cars. Each of these cars has been in continuous service since the late 1920s, and has accumulated more than one million miles. They are stil capable of traveling over 80mph.

The cars made two roundtrips on their last day, operating from 9:40am until 8:05 pm. Persons interested in preserving these cars can join the Friends of the South Shore Line, with a tax-deductible donation of annual dues of $5, $25, $50 or $100. Send name, address and telephone to the group at 1101 Franklin St, Michigan City IN 46360.

★★★

B.C. TRANSIT has discovered that about 3% of the steel being supplied for use in its steel-reinforced concrete beams is below standard. . The first line of the new transit system between Vancouver and New Westminster is expected to open in time for the 1986 World's Fair in Vancouver.

SEPTA BEGAN REPLACING 8000 ties and improving the roadbed on the Chestnut Hill West Regional High Speed Line between Chestnut Hill and North Philadelphia on Sep 19. SEPTA promised that rush hour service will not be affected by this major rebuilding project. In other SEPTA news, the agency announced thismonth that a newspaper poll taken in August showed that the Broad Street Subway is considered the best transit service in Philadelphia.

CALIF. TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION on Sep 22 voted to grant BART $13.8 million for 90 new cars and for construction of a Daly City turnaround. Santa Ana was voted $2.1 million for its intermodal station; Oxnard got $1.7 million for a similar project; Fullerton got $2.1 million for a transportation center; Santa Clara Co. got $18 million for its light rail line; S.F. Muni got $8 million for Market St. rebuilding.

Can the Spirit Be Revived?

As Sep 30 approached, it brought the impending demise of the overnight Sacramento-Los Angeles **SPIRIT OF CALIFORNIA.** The California legislature never did muster an effort towards an override vote of the governor's veto of funds for the train that the legislature had earlier voted for. As reported last issue in RTN, Senator Paul Laxalt of Nevada had supported a move to extend the train to Reno and make it part of the permanent, federally-funded Amtrak system. However, time was running out on the train and as the days drew closer to Sep 30 (the end of the fiscal year), a rail supporter effort was made in California to obtain a court restraining order to keep the train running for a time to allow additional time for efforts to work out some permanent solution. Rail supporters said that there was actually enough money in the state budget for the train to continue running it thru December.

In the month of August, NARP reported, ridership hit an all-time high. The spurt of ridership in the last few months was largely in response to advertising that had been paid for by donations from NARP and CRC members. Advertising had been all but non-existent previously. Caltrans did little or nothing to promote the train, and despite promises that they would make the train a "special case" and do something to help it, Amtrak people in Washington let rail supporters down and kept hands off.

The loss of the train is a "first" for California—the first Amtrak train that has been discontinued in the state. Californians had fought long and hard for the service, one which occupies a critically important route and time slot. Californians feel betrayed by their state officials and by Amtrak. The loss of the train will unfortunately leave a residue of bitterness toward the present Amtrak administration in the nation's most populous state, and will add fuel to the ever-present notion that Amtrak's Washington headquarters is out of touch with other parts of the nation in proportion as they are physically distant from Washington.

But the effort to keep or restore the service will continue. The material below, outlining proposals to restore and upgrade the service, was prepared by rail supporter Leif Lange, who has had an active role in the struggle to maintain this train.

★★★

Just as the economy is improving and large numbers of out-of-state and foreign tourists are expected in California for the 1984 Olympic Game, rail service linking Los Angeles with popular tourist destinations in Northern California is in danger. Amtrak's SPIRIT OF CALIFORNIA train, currently partly funded by the State of California and operating between Sacramento and Los Angeles, was initially funded for another year by the California legislature; however, this action was vetoed by Gov. Deukmejian.

A unique opportunity exists to maintain, improve, and extend rail service on the West Coast, serving and linking the major Reno-Sacramento-Bay Area-Southern California markets. Congress can now require Amtrak to convert this *intrastate* train, serving California's busiest rail corridor (on a rider per train basis) into a fully federally-funded *interstate* train operating between Reno and Los Angeles. This service would not require any additional rolling stock and could be operated within the confines of the existing Amtrak budget.

• 1984 OLYMPIC GAMES, LOS ANGELES. A large number of out-of-state and foreign tourists attending the Olympic Games will be requiring transportation to

tourist destinations in Northern California and Nevada. A German television crew recently filmed a documentary in Sacramento for the purpose of highlighting places to visit. The SPIRIT will offer ideal, convenient overnight transportation (a "hotel on wheels") for this international event.

• THE RENO EXTENSION REQUIRES NO ADDITIONAL ROLLING STOCK' The SPIRIT's equipment currently sits idle in Sacramento for 10 hours, while it could be making a roundtrip to Reno. Slight schedule modifications will allow the train to be serviced and turned in Reno, while preserving existing markets served by the train south of Sacramento.

• EXISTING TRAIN SERVICE TO RENO IS FREQUENTLY SOLD OUT, ESPECIALLY IN WINTER AND EARLY SPRING MONTHS. Poor Sierra winter driving conditions were among the reasons cited by Amtrak for predicting high ridership on a Reno extension. Amtrak expects an average of at least 150 riders to Reno per trip. Persons taking the existing train could return on the new service, and spend more time in Reno. For the first time, direct thru service would be available from San Jose, Santa Barbara, and Los Angeles to Reno. Ridership to Reno on the existing train increased 17.1% this winter due to inclement weather, while nationwide ridership was down.

• RAIL ACCESS TO SKI RESORTS AT NORDEN/SODA SPRINGS CAN BE PROVIDED. If both the existing CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR and the SPIRIT stopped at the resorts, one-day roundtrips from Reno would become possible.

• ADDITIONAL STATION STOPS ON THE SPIRIT WOULD HELP RIDERSHIP. Stops are recommended at Van Nuys, Simi Valley, Gilroy, Berkeley, Roseville and Norden/Soda Springs.

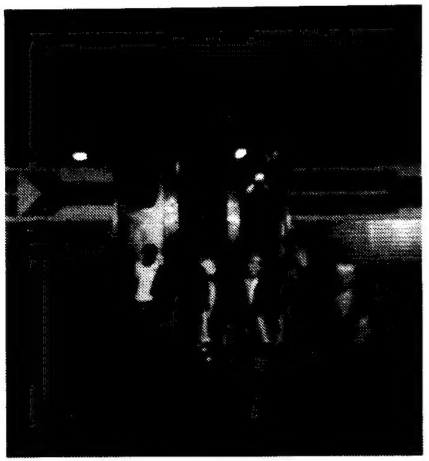
• DIRECT RAIL SERVICE TO SAN FRANCISCO AND SUBURBAN PENINSULA COMMUNITIES CAN BE IMPLEMENTED. A section of the train would be split off at San Jose. Amtrak currently serves San Francisco via a bus connection. Good access to Stanford Stadium and downtown San Francisco would be available.

• FULL FEDERAL FUNDING OF THE EXISTING SPIRIT AND THE RENO AND SAN FRANCISCO EXTENSIONS CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED WITHIN THE CONFINES OF AMTRAK'S EXISTING BUDGET. No supplemental appropriation is necessary. Amtrak is ahead of schedule in meeting Congressional performance goals. Additional service on a route allows better utilization of fixed facilities such as stations. Also, the budget already includes funds earmarked for the SPIRIT'S federal share.

• RIDERSHIP ON THE SPIRIT HAS SOARED IN RECENT MONTHS WITH BETTER WEATHER AND A MARKETING CAMPAIGN. Ridership was up 18.1% in May 1983 (over May 1982), and up 21% in June. An improving economy will result in ever-increasing ridership.

• STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE CALIFORNIA PORTION OF THE SPIRIT WAS EVIDENT IN THE CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE. Some 32 Members of the Assembly and Senate wrote the Governor in February requesting support for the service. Despite inclusion of funding in the budget, the Governor exercised his line-item veto authority.

• LONG, COSTLY LEGAL BATTLES WERE FOUGHT TO ESTABLISH AMTRAK'S RIGHT TO OPERATE ADDITIONAL TRAIN SERVICE ON SP. Similar battles could be expected if the service is allowed to lapse now and interest in revival arises at a later date. The odds are against rapid revival of rail service if another energy crisis develops when need for the service will be acute.



THE NEXT TO GO:

California rail supporters will soon need to gear up for another battle, this time over the next rail passenger route on Governor Deukmejian's hit list–that of the SAN JOAQUINS. *It is expected that the governor's henchmen will withdraw funding for the two trains in the near future.*

(left:) The last SAN JOAQUIN arrival of the day at Oakland, the 10:05pm train, unloads on a September evening. RTN photo.

• AMTRAK WILL RECEIVE $390,000 THIS YEAR FROM CARRYING MILITARY PACKAGE EXPRESS ON THE SPIRIT. Additional non-passenger revenues could be generated from express and overnight mail. Until funding for the train is secure, Amtrak cannot sign additional contracts.

• NO STATE-SUPPORTED TRAINS ARE FINANCED BY MORE THAN ONE STATE. It would not be realistic to expect California and Nevada to agree on a stable funding arrangement for bi-state service. Federal funding is the only solution for long distance sleeping car trains which cross state lines.

• FEDERAL JOBS-BILL MONIES ALLOCATED TO AMTRAK ARE EARMARKED FOR EXPENDITURE EXCLUSIVELY EAST OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER. An unneeded $1 million expenditure at East Lansing, Michigan and a $5 million project to upgrade the Cape Cod line (a local concern) are planned. A second daily frequency on the busiest part of Amtrak's best-performing long distance route (the COAST STARLIGHT) would help compensate for the lack of other projects.

• OVERNIGHT TRAIN SERVICE BETWEEN BOSTON AND WASHINGTON DC IS FULLY FEDERALLY FUNDED. Moreover, the SPIRIT carried 47% more first class sleeping car passengers in its first year of operation than did its long-established eastern counterpart, the NIGHT OWL. Regional equity requires that California, as the nation's most populous state, receive more than once-a-day service.

• AIR AND BUS DEREGULATION HAS RESULTED IN INCREASED FARES AND REDUCED SERVICE TO MANY COMMUNITIES. In California, Martinez has lost all intercity bus service and Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo have only limited air service. The SPIRIT would continue to serve these communities and link them to urban centers on Los Angeles and San Francisco. Also, United recently discontinued air service between Reno and Los Angeles, the second largest source of Reno tourists.

• WEEKEND-ONLY SERVICE ON THE SPIRIT IS ANOTHER OPTION. Full federal funding for a Friday-Saturday-Sunday train operating between Reno and Los Angeles would be possible, with additional service during peak periods. The existing Amtrak budget already contains funds earmarked for the federal share of a 403(b) SPIRIT; this amount should suffice to operate a federal train on weekends only when demand is strongest.

Enjoying the SKEENA

BY TED & SYLVIA BLISHAK

If VIA's train 10, the SKEENA, made all the stops on the timetable (16 scheduled, 40 flag stops), it would come to a halt 56 times in 27 hours. The SKEENA departs the northern British Columbia port of Prince Rupert every Sunday, Wednesday and Friday. After an overnight layover in Edmonton, it returns thru the vast Western-Canadian wilderness on a Monday, Thursday and Saturday schedule.

On Sep 3 we boarded a San Francisco-to-Vancouver flight, where we would connect on into Prince Rupert. As we watched a leak develop in the starboard engine of the 737, we were glad that the rest of our itinerary—by train, ship and car—would get us home on the surface of the earth. Distracting ourselves by gazing down on the huge icefields north of Vancouver—wild, empty peaks draped in glaciers—we soon landed at the tiny backwoods airport in Prince Rupert, the "Halibut Capital of the World."

After a bus/ferry connection into town (Prince Rupert is on an island), we checked into the Crest Motor Hotel, which we'd selected because it is only two blocks from the VIA station. If we leaned out the window of our room, we could see the yards, while diesels tooted and rumbled beneath our window all night. The hotel, which also featured a gourmet restaurant with a harbor view and a cozy bar decorated to look like a millionaire's library, was a comfortable spot in which to recover from the rigors of our flight.

After dark, over the roar of a sudden hailstorm, we detected the hiss of steam generators: the SKEENA had arrived from Edmonton, and was waiting to take on passengers the following morning.

On Sunday morning we checked out and walked downhill to the station. A brief cloudburst struck as we did so, and we arrived thoroly soaked! Steam curled from under the six-car train as we walked back to the next-to-last sleeper, "Elmsdale." Sleeping car porters D. Goodine and S. Kearney greeted us and helped us aboard. They had dark blue uniforms not unlike the one Claude Rains wore in "Casablanca."

After dropping off our dripping luggage in the bedroom, we decided to have a look inside the little station, which was bustling with passengers. Many seemed to be husky young backpacking types. We photographed the streamlined train, all blue with the double gold stripe, and climbed back aboard to change into dry clothing. Our young porter told us that after Sep 13 the SKEENA would run with only one sleeper—except for days during the winter when ferries arrived in port with connecting passengers. As we pulled out thru the busy harbor area of Prince Rupert, we noticed that both the Alaska State Ferry "Taku" and the British Columbia Ferry "Queen of the North" were in port. We chatted with a couple from Santa Cruz, California who had just disembarked from an inside cabin on the "Queen's" overnight cruise from Port Hardy.

Moving one car forward to the diner, we were greeted by Dining Car Steward I. Zenchuk, who knew we were on assignment for RTN and presented us with a copy of Bill Coo's book "Scenic Rail Guide to Western Canada" (see RTN 265). On the title page he had written "Welcome Aboard VIA Train 10, Prince Rupert to Jasper, Sept 4-5, 1983" and included a list of the sleeping and dining car staff. Besides himself, the dining car crew included waitress Esther Evans, barman W. McAllister, and chef W. Johnson.

The car seats 25 people; 20 in booths and five at a counter which is usually reserved for crew. Next to the counter is the carry-out section for passengers desiring portable

The eastbound SKEENA that the Blishaks rode pauses at Terrace, British Columbia, on Sep 4. Photos by the authors.

snacks, and on the far end of the car, behind the galley, is the bar-lounge with tables and chairs. One can eat snacks here, play cards, or order drinks (except on Sunday, due to British Columbia's "blue laws," when drinks can be purchased only with food).

Ted ordered breakfast, and was soon busy with a huge oval plate which contained two sausages, several strips of bacon, home-fried potatoes, fried eggs, and a basket of breads including fresh croissants.

The service was attentive and relaxed; food arrived promptly and with no fuss. We were always being asked, "Is everything alright here?" Mr. Zenchuk told us that VIA accepts 22 different types of credit cards from all over the world.

The diner was a rather unusual one, with a glass door on the rear. We heard that sometimes this car carries the markers, giving diners an exceptional backward view. The floor was carpeted in beige and brown; walls and cabinets were beige, turquoise and green. Booths were covered in purple vinyl; window curtains were a print of blue, green and purple. It all harmonized in a wildly pleasant way.

Leaving the canneries and sawmills behind, we followed the shoreline. Ferns and lush foliage climbed up a slate embankment on the inland side; a lonely stretch of grey water under grey skies stretched to mountainous islands across the channel. Yellow flowers bloomed along the water.

We passed slowly over bridges and past moored fishing boats. Streams of brown water cascaded down from the mountains above us, apparently polluted from wood-pulp

plants hidden in the trees. The highway which lay between the rails and the water was being repaired, with work crews in yellow slickers spending this rainy Sunday building new bridges along the route. We went into siding for a work train with welded rail aboard.

After breakfast we walked forward thru the two coaches. One, for long distance passengers, had fold-down trays; the other did not. Many riders had brought their own snacks.

We passed all our "flag stops" without pausing, and arrived in Terrace, where we dashed out for a breath of cold, windy air, and we picked up more passengers than we had boarded in Prince Rupert.

Returning to sleeper "Elmsdale," we took a closer look at the car. Sections took up the front third. Upholstered in red, these are bench-like facing seats with fixed high backs—comfortable for daytime travel because you can lean back on the headrests. At night, just like a 1930s movie, they convert to upper and lower bunks with zippered curtains.

In the center of the car are the bedrooms, with upper and lower berths at night. During the day, two armchairs (without high backs, unfortunately) provide movable seating. The toilet is in an enclosed, windowless cubicle, and a washbasin is in the main part of the room. Drinking water comes from one spigot, another, operated by a foot pedal, provides washing water. (We found the armchairs somewhat uncomfortable after an hour or two, and wished for the view out of both sides of the train that Superliner deluxe bedrooms provide. Once in awhile one of us would go out into the hallway and bend down to peer out the window on the other side of the train, in case we were missing any scenery.)

The last portion of the sleeper contained roomettes, some staggered so that you went up a step or two to get in, some at floor level.

Soon it was time for lunch. The menu offered two selections: a hot pot roast sandwich and a salmon salad. Many extras, such as soup, rolls, vegetables, fruit cocktail, and beverage, were included, all for $6.50 Canadian. The tasty food was hearty and plentiful

The SKEENA boards passengers at Prince Rupert, B.C.

enough for a backpacker. (We recognized the soup as Campbell's.)

A few minutes later we made our first flag stop at the tiny community of Usk, with its small white clapboard station. A plot with flowers and corn flourished next to it, and three cows grazed among the cabins. We continued along the water, which at some point had changed from Chatham Sound to the wide Skeena River. Waterfalls cascaded in white ribbons from the mountaintops across the way right into the river. Our next flagstop was at little Doreen, and soon we could see the Borden Glacier hanging in a saddle between the mountains.

During lunch, a passenger from Michigan, who had just taken the Alaska Ferry, offered to take our picture. A five-year-old girl behind us said, "Mommy, I'm so glad we're on a train and not on a plane! Such pretty mountains!" Her mother talked about her teenage years. "I used to catch freights out here in the summer. Then I'd stay and paint the mountains, go back to town and sell the paintings, and come back again." She was taking her daughter, who had spent the summer with relatives in Prince Rupert, back home to Edmonton to begin kindergarten.

One of the Canadian backpackers sat with a German backpacker and quizzed him: "How much time must you spend in the military? How long have you been in Canada? Where will you go from here?" Nearly everyone on board, even the overseas tourists who could barely speak English, were carrying copies of Bill Coo's book and referring to maps and mileposts. On page 126, Coo states about the train's stop at Kitwanga: "A pack of dogs meets each passenger train at the station to scavenge for scraps from the dining car. One, Pegleg, lost his leg when he sneaked under a train as it inched thru the station." Even tho we arrived at the little Indian settlement an hour and 10 minutes late, the dogs scampered down the dusty street to meet us—Pegleg included!

The sun broke thru now, highlighting an occasional tree dressed in red and gold foliage. We passed a big Canadian National work train laying track, and some cars pulled into a siding with laundry strung between them, apparently home for the crew.

The snow-covered peaks of Seven Sisters dominated the scene for the next few miles, making us wish that the SKEENA still carried a dome (It did until two years ago, when it was the victim of a cutback. "Not cost-effective," sighed our porter. "CN charges VIA a lot to use the tracks—both by pounds and by kilometers."

Once we crossed the river, our bedroom no longer faced the water, so we moved forward to an unoccupied section where we could put our feet up and lean back to enjoy a view out of both sides of the train. The mountains were lower now, no longer snow-covered. We passed quaking aspens, and some fields of hay baled in various shapes: some triangular, some rolled up like jellyrolls, and some like loaves of bread.

A big CN freight put us in the hold; most of the cars carried the Canadian Wheat Board label. Our porter explained that in Canada farmers grow wheat and turn it over to the government. The government then sets the market price and decides how it is to be distributed. (We read later in the paper that the railroads are paid a larger portion of the proceeds for *carrying* the wheat than the farmers are paid for *growing* it. More than half of Canada's wheat is exported.)

We stopped at Smithers, the largest settlement since Terrace, then pulled out one hour and 20 minutes late. High mountains nearby were being dusted with powdered snow. Fantastic cloud shapes played with sunbeams and shadows.

Back out of the farmlands and into another forest, we spied a black bear about 100 feet from the tracks. Waitress Esther Evans went thru to call the last sitting for dinner. When we arrived in the diner, all the seats were taken; the steward suggested we wait in

the bar/lounge. It seemed rather sparsely decorated (no blue-green-purple here, just browns). We purchased soft drinks from the carry-out and waited our turn, while a quartet of college girls returning for the fall term spoke of their ambitions at the table in front. Behind us, a woman in her 20s confided over a card game to a new-found chum, "I've always lived in Terrace. My mum's a mile away, aunts and uncles next door, brother-in-law down the road. But now that I'm divorcing my husband, I need to get a new start, eh? I'll have a new job waiting in Edmonton—don't think I'll want a steady relationship yet for a year or two..."

Club-car confessions murmured on as the sun sank low over Frazer Lake and we went in to dinner. For $9.50 we had a choice of chicken or pot roast, including soup, salad, an olive and pickle tray, beverage, and apple pie. We ordered the pot roast, which was good. The woman across from us, a Canadian-Indian, complained that her chicken was watery and tasteless. Portions would have satisfied a lumberjack. We noticed that everyone on the train (and we noticed this again and again thruout Western Canada) was soft-spoken. Even the inevitable dining-car heckler hassled the steward in well-modulated tones.

We were continually losing time; the SKEENA gave way to every freight we passed. Sometimes we'd back out of sidings onto the main, then proceed forward. But we were personally in no rush; our scheduled 6:00am arrival in Jasper, where we would detrain, was inconveniently early anyhow, since the Avis car rental office wouldn't be open until 9:00am.

As our porter ma de up our room, he entertained us with a story about some passengers he'd had once who had won a SKEENA ticket in a contest. Due to some kind of mixup, this family of Saskatchewan farmers ("The parents were kind of Canadian Gothic, eh?") arrived with three husky grown children, all ticketed for one bedroom with one upper and lower. The train was sold out, of course.

During the night we awoke several times as we stopped in sidings. Rain beat on the roof. Eventually, the growl of a passing freight would signal our clearance to return to the main line, and we'd be on our leisurely way again.

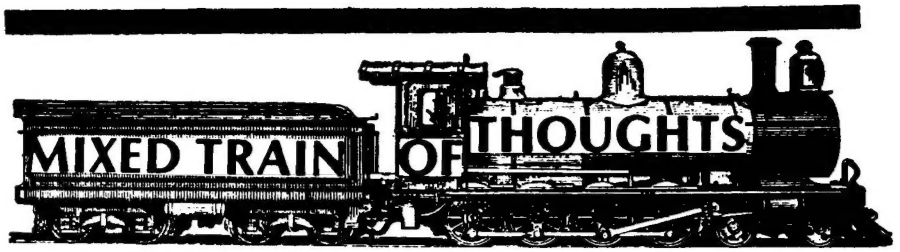
Dawn broke as we crossed the border into Alberta and into another time zone. We were about two hours behind schedule. After all the snow-covered mountains of yesterday, we expected more of the same and were unprepared for the *gigantic* granite crags and lakes outside our window—too spectacular for words! New track with concrete ties was being constructed along our route.

Our clubby little six-car train, with a full load of 125 passengers, arrived at the Jasper station, having averaged 35 3/4mph for the trip. Red flowers were blooming in boxes, an ice cream/snack/souvenir shop was on one side, and three car rental companies had installed phones for free pickup. A bus station counter and a steam engine on display outside completed the picture. Avis arrived with our Buick and we were ready to begin our drive down the Icefield Highway to Lake Louise.

CONSIST OF VIA TRAIN 10

Engine 6514; cars 9487 baggage-crew car, coach 5497, coach 5452, diner-snack-bar-lounge car 761, sleeper "Elmsdale", sleeper "Ethelbert."

(All equipment was former CN.)



A NATIONWIDE NUMBER for telephoning Amtrak information and reservations will be inaugurated as of Oct 6. The number will be 800-USA-RAIL. (In numbers, that's 800-872-7245.) This number can be used in all the 48 contiguous states. Some major cities which also have non-800 numbers can still use them, but other 800 numbers previously in use will no longer be valid. Travel agents who use special numbrs to reach Amtrak reservations will still be able to use them.....

MEALS ON TRAYS served in Amtrak full-service dining cars are being phased out, Amtrak said. Trays will no longer be used. Salad, entree and dessert will be served separately at different times, as per tradition. Amtrak said this change began as an experiment on the BROADWAY and SILVER METEOR about Sep 19. Amtrak bragged that in August an average of 60% of riders on trains with full-service diners partook of dinner and breakfast on the train. On some trains the figure was over 80%. A year earlier, the percentage was less than 50%, Amtrak said. Lunch is a much less popular time to eat in the diner, as only about 35% do so in full-service diners. (Many people may buy lunch snacks outside the diner, bring their own, or skip lunch, a common practice).....

★★★

HOT SNACK MENU will be expanded with the Oct 30 schedule change in lounge cars and Amcafe-type operations, Amtrak said. And sea food menus over the system will be regionalized.....

AMTRAK PRESIDENT CLAYTOR on Oct 30 is scheduled to address a meeting of private railroad car owners in New Orleans. With over 25 private cars being assembled there, it's billed as the largest gathering of private cars in moder times.....

THE CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR in Julyhad a 22.3% increase in ridership compared to July 1982, Amtrak reported, while long distance trains as a whole had a 6.4% jump. This happened as a result of the re-routing of the train, Amtrak said, even tho the re-routing was effective only half of the month. In August the increase was 18.5%, compared to 3.0% for all long distance trains. Much of the new traffic is riding between Denver and Glenwood Springs, for the most part, Amtrak said. The Denver-Ogden segment of the train's route is now the strongest, whereas it was the weakest before the re-routing, Amtrak said.....

HUNTINGTON, WEST VIRGINIA gets its new station opened, on the CARDINAL route, on Oct 5.....

HOBOKEN, NEW JERSEY railroad station, a non-Amtrak station will the the scene of an annual railroad celebration on Oct 1. This year marks Amtrak's first appearance at the festival after several years of invitations. Amtrak will have on display a set of three refurbished Amfleet I cars for Metroliner Service—Amclub, Amdinette and a 60-seat coach—, a 10/6 sleeper and an Amfleet II lounge. One of the reasons Amtrak hadn't participated before was that it required a "wildly complicated routing" to get the cars to the Hoboken station. The station is on the ex-Erie Lackawanna line.....

A FOLLOW-UP TO the report in RTN 274, page 17, about the New York readers who were accused by the crew of smoking marijuana in their sleeping car on the CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR: An Amtrak customer relations specialist wrote to our readers a letter of apology for their treatment. She said that a full and formal investigation of the incident would be conducted involving the conductor and the sleeping car attendant who "did not conduct themselves in a more appropriate and professional manner".....

SELMA, NORTH CAROLINA was holding Railroad Days on Oct 1 and 2. Amtrak was having on display there a 59-seat Amfleet II coach and a Heritage sleeper. Also on display were an SCL freight locomotive and a caboose.....

"MYSTERY TRAIN" PROMOTER Tucker Lamkin wants to resume rail passenger operations between Scranton and Hoboken; there has been none for years. One problem involved in this plan is that some of the tracks are tied up in a dispute between the city of Scranton and a neighboring county.....

THE ORIENT EXPRESS celebrates its 100th anniversary with the run of Oct 4-5. The train began operation Oct 4, 1883, the brain child of the Belgian George Nagelmackers who got the idea while traveling in the U.S. On that 1883 occasion, a fabled 9-course dinner was served, and for the 100th birthday an identical dinner will be offered for travelers who are paying $2000 each for the special trip from London to Venice. According to a report in USA Today, the birthday dinner will include fresh foie gras, fresh lobster, caviar, smoked salmon, beef, truffles, rare wine and vintage champagne. Sleeping cars will be outfitted with damask sheets.....

★★★

THE COLORADO MIDLAND promoters who want to inaugurate rail passenger service across Wyoming, filling the void left by Amtrak's shift to the Rio Grande, are faced with the problem of convincing the UP to let them use its tracks. But an Amtrak spokesman told RTN that the rail corporation would be willing to sign a contract with Colorado Midland for the operation, providing Amtrak would receive some fees if the operation proved profitable.....

AMTRAK BOARD MEETING of Sep 21 saw no action taken on the proposed Tampa-St. Petersburg service change. This was because the bill authorizing Amtrak's FY 84 funding is stalled in Congress, and attached to it is a provision prohibiting Amtrak from making the change before Oct 1, 1985. Amtrak must await the bill's passage before it knows what it can do. Also at the meeting, the finance committee reported that Amtrak officials met with the tri-state commission that is promoting a Mobile-New Orleans 403(b) service. Such service would begin at the end of April 1984 and continue thru Sep 1984—the last five months of the fiscal year. No actual formal 403(b) proposal has been filed yet by the backers, but Amtrak said it expects one to be filed soon. Amtrak says initiation of the service appears "quite feasible".....

STATION STAFFING CHANGES have not been announced yet by Amtrak, but the rail corporation said that an announcement is expected soon.....

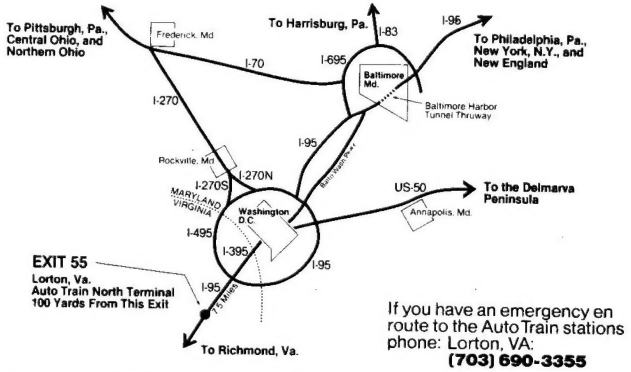
WHO'LL GET CONRAIL? is a question that many would like to know the answer to. According to industry insiders, those "in the know" believe that it will to to the Union Pacific.....

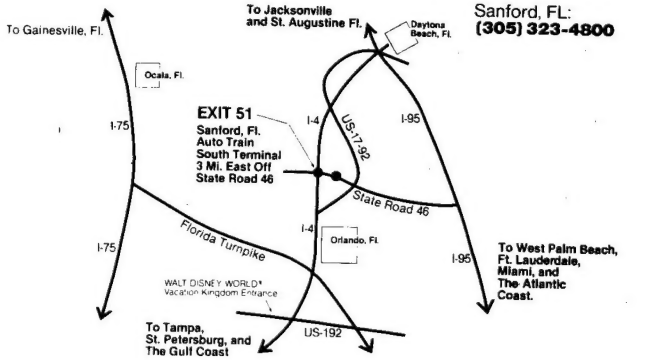
ADAMS MAINTENANCE-OF-WAY facility in North Brunswick, New Jersey was dedicated recently by Amtrak.....

SAN DIEGO ASSOCIATION of Governments' regional planning and research agency on Sep 30 was critical of the method used by American High Speed Rail to arrive at ridership projections. The agency said the predictions were too optimistic.

But American High Speed replied that the agency didn't have access to additional studies that had verified the projections.....

THE ALASKA RAILROAD was the subject of a highly-recommended article in the *Wall Street Journal* of Sep 20. The US Railway Association has been studying the value of the railroad in order to make a recommendation as to what the state should pay the federal government for it in the coming transfer of ownership. The USRA reportedly is recommending $20-25 million, and tho there will be some bickering, it sounds as if the state will agree to that amount.....





AUTO TRAIN TERMINAL MAPS are shown here, as found in a new Auto Train information folder published by Amtrak. An Amtrak spokesman said of the new operation this month that a 55% load factor was used as the basis of the rail corporation's projections of profitability. The first couple of southbound runs are sold out, Amtrak said. No passes can be used on the train. There were be some press people on the first runs, but they will be paying full fare. Reader Robert Clark of Sanford FL comments on Andrew Selden's article of last issue: "(He) may have the rest of his comments right, but he is way off base about Auto Train. That's one of the things Amtrak is right about. The original Auto Train was not a drag on the two Amtrak trains because different kinds of people used the different kinds of trains. Most A-T customers were people who stayed in Florida for the season, not 2-week vacationers. The $1106 family fare quoted by Mr. Selden is a deliberate goofy that Amtrak has no expectation of seeing. They are gearing up for the car with two passengers, the older people who are retired and hate driving, but want their car for the season they stay there".....

THE COAST STARLIGHT was running 9 hours late on Sep 30. An SP freight derailment near Dunsmuir tore up 1200 feet of track. The SP neglected to report the problem to Amtrak, and trains 11 and 14 sat near Dunsmuir waiting for clearance. The track reopened at 9am on the 30th.....

THE SUNSET LIMITED, train 1 , detoured between Picacho and Wellton AZ on the SP's Gila Subdivision on Sep 30 due to high water near Phoenix.....

OCTOBER SCHEDULE CHANGES: The SUNSET LIMITED will have 45 minutes cut from its schedule in each direction on Oct 30. The CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR will be re-routed on the WP (now the UP) between Salt Lake City and Winnemucca NV, to avoid the problem trackage across the Great Salt Lake on the SP. (This puts it back on the original route of the CZ for that portion.) Amtrak will move its Salt Lake City station facility from the UP station to the Rio Grande station, operating out of the former baggage annex of the station, as D&RGW did (this report of the station move is unconfirmed). The PENNSYLVANIAN will run thru cars between Pittsburgh and New York (as reported previously). AUTO TRAIN operation will begin between Lorton VA and Sanford FL. The CALIF. ZEPHYR will leave Chicago earlier, at 2pm, arriving Denver about 7am (earlier). The LAKE SHORE willhave its schedule lengthened by about 10-15mins. The EMPIRE BUILDER will have faster running times between Chicago, Milwaukee and Minneapolis. The PIONEER will depart Seattle earlier, reportedly at 6:45am, to fit in with the CZ's new schedule and routing. There will be some minor changes in other long distance trains, it is reported. The NORTH STAR will operate on Friday, Saturday and Sunday only until the April schedule change. The EMPIRE BUILDER no. 7 will leave Chicago at 2:45pm and Milwaukee at 4:20; train 8 eastbound will have no time changes west of St. Cloud but will leave St. Paul at 7:15pm, arrive Milwaukee at 1:29pm, and reach Chicago at 3:08pm (42 minutes earlier). The westbound CAL. ZEPHYR, train 5, will arrive Denver at 6:50am, earlier than the present 7:40.....

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PORTLAND, OREGON HAS an Amtrak Great American Rail Road Show on October 8 and 9.....

BALTIMORE'S PENN STATION, beautifully restored, was rededicated on Sep 14, the occasion of its 72nd birthday. Amtrak, FRA people and a Maryland Senator were present for the ceremonies.....

OKLAHOMA ROUTE STUDY will be completed by late November, Amtrak said. The study includes more alternative routes than it first did, accounting for the longer production time it has required.....

AMTRAK ROUTE SURVEYS were made between Kansas City and Omaha the last week in September, with a test train running north on the BN via St. Joseph and south on the MoPac via Atchison.....

CLEVELAND-PITTSBURGH ROUTE study has been requested of Amtrak by the state of Ohio. This marks the first time Ohio has made such a request. NARP said that the route is a "notorious gap in the Amtrak system, dating back to the creation of the corporation".....

STARTING OCTOBER 30, VIA Rail's evening train Toronto-Niagara Falls will stop at Oakville, a transfer point from the Amtrak INTERNATIONAL. This will permit a same-day rail journey between Chicago and Niagara Falls, Ontario.....

KANSAS CITY STATION will get a temporary inflated structure inside the big station building for Amtrak to use as its station facility. This is necessary if the owners of the station cut off the heat this winter. Approval for this came at the Amtrak Board meeting of Sep 21. Also at the meeting, approval was given to Trailways bus company's move into Amtrak's Cleveland Lakefront station.....

NEW JERSEY'S GOVERNOR in late September announced his support for the Atlantic City trains, and pledged $20 million as the state's share, making it eligible for $30 million in matching federal funding.....

ALABAMA GOVERNOR WALLACE has pledged over $160,000 for his state's share in starting up the New Orleans-Mobile service.....

THE CALIF. ZEPHYR on Sep 24 boarded 426 people westbound at Denver, most of them traveling to Glenwood Springs; the next day 404 returned Glenwood-Denver

News in this issue is updated thru September 30, 1983.

What's Doing at Beech Grove

A Look at Amtrak's Repair & Maintenance Shops

The big news from Beech Grove is that Amtrak has stripped an Amcoach, car no. 21222, and is rebuilding it into a track inspection car, which is believed to be numbered 10001. Those who have seen the car say that it is unusual indeed. Part of the car's end has been cut away to form an open observation end. Large bay windows have been installed near the rear. Quartz halogen lights are mounted on the rear to illuminate the track. A TV camera is also mounted on the rear, to focus on the rails. Computers are built into the car. Wheels have been partially sealed over. The center sill of the car has been filled with lead to simulate the weight of a heavy hopper car.

The following Superliner sleepers are known to have been modified thus far, with the upstairs public bathroom etc.: 32001, 32017, 32036, 32058 and 32068.

Superliner sleeper 32010 has been retired due to fire damage.

The following car rebuildings and renumberings have been done for Auto Train equipment: lounge car 3310 becomes 8701; dome 9486 becomes 9408 (murals are saved inside); dome 9477 becomes 9407; dome 9486 becomes 9408; sleeper 2250 "Star Bay" becomes 2230 (it had suffered firedamage); sleeper 2202 "Silver Thrush" becomes 2221; sleeper 2442 "Cottonwood Grove" retains its old number; 11-bedroom sleeper 2220 is on the list, old number unknown; coach 4610 is rebuilt into Table Car 8603; coach 4604 becomes Table Car 8601; sleeper "Silver Chasm" 2657 becomes 2462; sleeper "Silver Quail" 2201 becomes 2220; cars 2476, 2892 and 9402 (dome) are also on Beech Grove's list, but we have no information about their old or new numbers.

Table Cars for the Auto Train will be equipped with trash compactors.

Engine 382 is at Beech Grove for repair of damage. Engine 311, damaged in the STATE HOUSE wreck of July 28, is being repaired at Chicago, and has already received a new nose. The train collided with a truck and the truck body sheet metal ended up wrapped around the windshield of the Amtrak engine. (The train derailed, tho not the locomotive, and 18 people were hospitalized.)

The "View" series full-length domes for the Auto Train will be renumbered in the 9300 series.

Contrary to other reports, the following domes have not been scrapped, but are at Beech Grove: "Silver Tulip", "Silver Terrace", and "Silver Veranda."

CARS & CONSISTS

***CITY OF NEW ORLEANS, train 59, New Orleans Sep 20: engines 700, 314; cars 1224, 2463, 28009, 4738, 4626, 4638, 21086 (off at Carbondale). (Engine 700 was badly damaged in a collision with a drag line north of New Orleans along Lake Pontchartrain on Sep 14, pulling train 58.)**

***MOUNT RAINIER, train 797, Seattle Sep 18: engines 367, 331; cars 34046, 34004, 34024, 34011, 34081, 39944, 34023, 39949, 39946, 34015, 39940, 39950, 34019, 39942, 39948. Extra cars for Seahawks game in Seattle.**

***Ontario Northland train 622, Moosonee, Ontario Sep 8: engines ON 1502 & 1509; 26 freight cars, POLAR BEAR EXPRESS (ON) coach 836, coach 802, food-bar "Meechim", coach 806, baggage cars 410 & 411, caboose 111.**

***COAST STARLIGHT, train 14, Oakland Sep 5: engines 283, 254; cars 1154, 39918, 31015, 31021, 34036, 34066, 39949, 39944, 33019, 38014, 32020, 32060, 39975 off at Oakland. (This train was to detour over the Bieber line to Klamath Falls.)**

***EL COSTENO, FCP train 2, Nogales, Sonora Sep 3: engines 573, 540, 544 (all FCP), 543 (N de M); cars 254 Correo, 1210, 1258, 1255, 1264, 1274 all Primera especial, 1966 Primera, "Rio Moctezuma," "Rio Tamazula," "Aguila Imperial," "Finlandia," SCD "Canada." Cantina and coche comedor to be added off FCS-BC no. 4 at Benjamin Hill, Sonora.**

RAIL FANTRIPS

Oct 22: Strasburg Special, Washington DC-Strasburg PA RT, electric & steam. Lv 7:45am, back 9:30pm. Special $9.50 dinner at Hershey Farm Restaurant. $47 adult, $43 child (5-11), under 5 free. Sponsor: Washington DC Chapter NRHS. Strasburg Special, PO Box 456, Laurel MD 20707. Capacity limited; all reserved.

Nov 3-13: Baja Adventure. Comprehensive tour of Baja California by land from San Diego to Cabo San Lucas at tip of Baja Peninsula in Mexico. Led by Henry Luna. Great Western Tours, Sheraton Palace Hotel, Suite 900, San Francisco CA 94105.

Send large SASE when responding to listings. One Rail Fantrips listing is free. Send info to: RAIL TRAVEL NEWS, Fantrips Dept, PO Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709.

EXPRESS ADS

AMTRAK - VIA RAIL CANADA - EURAIL PASS - OCEAN LINER CRUISES - RAIL TOURS - RAIL EXCURSIONS - CHARTER RAIL CARS. Arrangements by phone or appointment - use your credit card - Tickets mailed promptly. A fully appointed travel agency with masters of ship and rail travel. GREAT WESTERN TOURS, Sheraton Palace Hotel, Suite 900, 639 Market Street, San Francisco CA 94105. (415) 398-2994.

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LARGE RAILROAD CHRISTMAS CARDS from as low as $2.41 dozen, delivered. PREDDY'S CARDS, Box 572, Point Roberts WA 98281-0572. Free sample. Canadian $ at par.

GISELLE'S TRAVEL CORP at 1215 4th St. Sacramento CA 95814, Phone: (916) 446-1211 offers rail tickets on AMTRAK - VIA (CANADA) - EURAILPASS along with tours and accommodations in cities to which you are traveling. Let Giselle's help you take your next memorable rail trip.

WHAT IS the legal basis of the NARP board's refusal to publish an ANNUAL REPORT of receipts and expenditures and of major Association activities and goals??

I wonder how much interest and support there is among the ranks of the American rail travel advocates for the establishment of a new public interest entity to be called the RAIL TRAVEL PROGRESS INSTITUTE, or RTI for short. The Institute would carry out what NARP, because of organizational and other handicaps, has obviously been unable to do in the past 12 years--force Amtrak to act in the responsive manner in which a government agency must by law act. RTI's purpose would not be to compete with or supplant NARP! To accomplish this goal, RTI would rely upon such means as the substantive rights granted by the federal Administrative Procedure Act, but would confine itself to important and precedent-setting projects. The Institute would be incorporated and would have its main office in the District of Columbia. Its constitution would be modeled on that of one of the many similar public interest groups now operating in Washington. Interested parties are requested to communicate their views to Alfred E. Ehm, 170 Carousel Drive, San Antonio TX 78227.

"ISSUES IN AMERICAN RAIL TRAVEL", RTN's little book on important problems with America's rail passenger revival, is almost ready for publication. Price will be $4.50, which includes relevant tax & postage. Full details will be given later in RTN. Rail Travel News, PO Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709.

RTN ADVERTISING RATES: Express Ads cost just $1.00 per line of 80 spaces. Display ads are only $1.25 per square inch. RTN, Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709.

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LETTERS

(continued from page 2)

letter ought to consider going into sales work for Amtrak. There his enthusiasm could be useful.

Stephen Shields, CTC
Shields World Travel
Pleasanton, California

I certainly agree with "Name Withheld" that there are many travel agencies who are not familiar with Amtrak, and therefore may not handle it well. Consumers might want to check with an Amtrak-appointed agency to see if they have Golden Spike status (which is only awarded to high producers who are familiar with the Amtrak ticketing procedures; quite different than the airline system). Or, ask if the travel agent has taken the Amtrak ticketing class (offered free every few months).

However, I would like to remind Mr. Withheld that there are many inexperienced Amtrak reservationists too, and I have had occasion to correct them on routing, prices, and rules from time to time.

As for his statement that travel agents frequently overcharge customers—"the larger the sale, the larger the commission", I must assume that this is only an opinion based on prejudice, not fact. Most travel agencies are small businesses, and depend on repeat customers for *most* of their sales. If we overcharged our customers $10, for example, the extra $1 commission would hardly compensate for the loss of credibility, loss of customer good will, and loss of future business.

Amtrak is one of the carriers *most supportive* of travel agencies, and this attitude is reflected in most of Amtrak's employees, who do not feel that they are competing with us for commissions, but getting a lot of business and assistance from us. However, about two years ago, I ticketed a client on an Amtrak coach fare rather than a roundtrip excursion fare because I was told by reservations that the excursion fares on that particular routing had been sold out (it was a limited-seating type of fare). My client came back for a refund, because an Amtrak ticket agent told her the excursion rate had become available, and that I had probably overcharged her to get a higher commission! Naturally, I lost the client because of this untrue supposition!

Sylvia Blishak
Accent on Travel
Menlo Park, California

QUOTES OF THE WEEK ***

"With friends like CNR, Via Rail doesn't need many more enemies.

"After recent service cutbacks, it seemed Via's public relations image could only improve. But last week, things grew even worse as we discovered that senior citizens, passengers on Via's Prince Rupert-Edmonton run, had to struggle across tracks with canes and luggage when they reached Jasper. CNR had allowed plush private rail cars full of executives attending a Jasper convention to block the platform. So when the normal Via run arrived in town, the seniors had to disembark on makeshift wooden planks at 6 a.m. and stumble past the cars of slumbering executives.

"Considering the circumstances, one would have thought CNR might have been a little repentent, even embarrassed. Not so, it seems. The company's assistant public affairs manager, Alex Rennie, said CNR decided the executives would use the platform more often than Via's customers. He added, if the passengers 'didn't choose to walk to the planks but took a short-cut instead, that's their responsibility." Well, someone should be made to walk the plank—and it's not senior citizens who paid for decent service when they paid for their tickets..."

—Edmonton Journal editorial, August 12.